

Guru Gobind Singh : A World-Hero

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**He has his shining place in the galaxy
of the great Heroes of Humanity.**

**Three centuries have passed, since
he wrought the wonder of his life. A
Brother of the poor and persecuted, he
became a Saviour of Hindusthan, a
Liberator of India.**

**To-day, thinking of the sufferings
of our countrymen,—the Panjabis, the
Bengalis, the Sindhis, sons and daugh-
ters of sorrow,—thinking of the pover-
ty and privations of the village-folk,
of the tragedy of the Shrines that once
safeguarded the spiritual treasures of
uprooted people,—today, we turn, again
and again, to Gobind Singh and other
heroes of our history.**

**I marvel at his greatness. His life
was brief : born in 1666, he passed on
in 1708, at the age of forty-two. He
built the Free Khalsa State in the love
of God and man. In a letter to his**

opponent, the Moghul king of India, Aurangzeb, the great Guru said :—"You look to your kingdom and wealth: I turn to the immortal kingdom of God!"

The great Guru came in a period of darkness and despair in our history. One prayer, one cry and one curse against the tyranny of the State filled India, from end to end. Aurangzeb was simple and pure in private life: but he had a sectarian mind. He thought of winning heaven by converting Hindus to Islam: and he came to believe in conversion by force. Much did the Hindus suffer. Guru Gobind Singh was one of those truly great ones who appear, again and again, in history, to pour out their strength as a sacrifice to nourish the weak and needy.

A western critic has compared him to Napoleon. The comparison is not correct. Napoleon was a great soldier, a great military general. Guru Gobind Singh was a warrior-saint. Without an equal, perhaps, was Napoleon in his control of conditions and circumstances: he dashed across the desert: he flung

his armies against the gate of the Orient : he smote to feverish activity slothful Europe : he infused millions with the electric force of a revolution : he became the master of Europe at thirty-two ! But at what cost ? They called him “ the Great Unloved, ” as Guru Gobind Singh they called, “ the Great Beloved ” ! Napoleon was drunk with power : Guru Gobind Singh walked in humility, moved in the presence of the Supreme, and regarded himself as a servant of God called to go, from place to place, to sow in the hearts of men “ the seed of the Eternal. ” In his autobiography, *Vichitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh says :—

*I think of Him who transcendeth time
and space;*

I see Him looking at me,

And I do as He beckons me to do :

I come singing His Name !

And I go sowing the seed of the Eternal !

Napoleon strode the world like a Colossus, and he failed ! Guru Gobind Singh found his joy and strength in taking “ shelter at the feet of God. ”

Guru Gobind Singh stands out among the most dynamic of India's men. Yet he stood for sometime remote from actual life. His instincts were those of a *bhakta* and his perceptions were those of a poet. "I have come," he sang, "to behold the wonders of the world."

He was a mystic and loved to have quiet communion with God. He was in his meditations on the Hem Kuta mountains, when there came to him a call from the Depths:—"My son! invoke the Holy Name and resist the evil-doers!" The call converted his life into tremendous action. The *bhakta*, the poet, the lover of the beautiful, the dweller in silence and seclusion, the singer of the wonder of the world became a practical man. He became a leader of men, the builder of new Hindusthan.

Guru Gobind Singh came down from the mountains to the plains, where raged a conflict between the Moghul king and his oppressed Hindu subjects. A life of suffering was the Guru's : but his heart knew no fear.

“I declare to the world what the Lord has told me,” he said; and he added:—
“I shall not be silent through fear of mortals.” In yet another song he sang:—
“Thou turnest men like myself from grass blades into great mountains.”
How singularly free was his life from that egotism which often lurks hidden in men of action ! He regarded himself a servant of the people : his love flowed out to the poor and weak : it shielded them : it suffered for them : and it worked a revolution in Indian history.

Guru Gobind Singh was not a politician, surely not a political “adventurer” ! Him I regard as a prophet who dedicated his life to God and the service of man. “I have found refuge at the feet of God,” he said, again and again.

What magic was there in his words, his mere presence, his Face Divine ? He transformed meek men into fearless lion-hearted warriors of the Light ! The very Himalayas were a part of his soul ! In his period of wandering, after the battle of Chamkor, he halted in the Lakhi jungle. His

disciples gathered round him, there, in hundreds and thousands : there, he composed a pathetic song, which, even today, brings tears to the eyes of Sikh disciples :—

*They heard the call of the Beloved :
And they came running, running,
They came crying to the Master !
Even as runs the scattered herd of
buffaloes,
Dropping the half-chewn grass from
their mouths,
So ran to him the disciples,
On hearing his voice,—
The enchanting voice of the Beloved !*

Such men have appeared but at rare intervals in history,—men, who could almost command the very forces of nature and stir the very stones to life ! What a relief, a consolation, a source of strength must he have been to thousands and thousands of those who heard his name in that dark day of our history,—the day of Moghul domination and Hindu helplessness ! Hope blended with courage in the hearts of his people, when they thought :—“We are not orphans on the earth: this master-man lives !”

Sikh history is a wonderful record of sufferings endured for faith and freedom. Once, according to a Sikh story, a new musket was brought as a present to Guru Gobind Singh. He said,—in good humour, one may be sure,—that he wanted to try the musket on some one's forehead. He paused to know if anyone of his followers would offer himself for the trial. Quick came up a number of Sikhs, each one regarding it a privilege to meet death at the Guru's hand! His disciples were trained in a school of hardship: they believed that life must not be hoarded but poured out as a sacrifice.

What makes the Sikh records almost unique in the world's annals is the number of women and young men and boys who entered into the Sikh struggle for freedom. How cheerfully they suffered privations, persecutions, even death! The four sons of the Guru were arrested but were promised release on condition that they would leave their father. What did they say? "We shall stand by our father and resist *adharma*!" It was a painful death they were subjected to. They were bricked up alive!

To the last they stood, with divine defiance in their eyes, and said:—"Do thy business, tyrant! We are happy!" And their last aspiration was breathed out in the beautiful prayer:—"Thy will be done, O God!" They practised the lesson taught them by the Guru:—"Meditate on Him in your heart!" And so they found the strength to suffer for faith and glorify God in the midst of isolation and agony. They were boys of tender age.

Many others, too, suffered cruel deaths in the mighty struggle for freedom led by Guru Gobind Singh. Boys became martyrs and simple, rough peasants became patriots. Even women fought in Guru Gobind Singh's battles. They fought and were wounded: they rejoiced in their sufferings. Whence came to them the strength to suffer heroically? In one of his hymns, Guru Nanak sings:—

*Go to God in thy troubles !
Meditate on His Name !
Respect thou His Name !
And He will save thee !*

This teaching of "going to God"

sank into the soul of the Khalsa. The word “Khalsa” means “pure”. Pure, not puritan. The pure in heart see God. And only the pure of purpose and strong of resolve can win freedom. Wiser was the Guru than many a modern politician who asks for abolition of religion. The Guru realised that religion was a dynamic power. The Khalsa could have achieved little but for the power of dynamic, purifying, transforming, character-building religion inspired by worship of God and service of the poor.

The history of the Sikh Faith is full of illustrations of the vitality of religious idealism. Suffering strengthens the man who worships the Ideal. The Khalsa became all the purer, stronger, richer in faith and character for their training in the School of Dedication to the Divine Will,—the School of danger and sacrifice. The hearts and minds of Sikh men and women were revolutionised by the power of faith. It taught the Sikhs to build a New Order: the Khalsa became One Family in the Guru for the service of the poor, the service of India. Like their great Guru, they found their strength “at the feet of God” :

they put service above power: and the poor peasants, who rallied round the Guru, worked greater wonders than have been achieved, in our days, by peasants of Russia.

In the Guru's message patriotism was blended with religion. He regarded himself as a servant and a soldier of God. He realised that he was a "son of the Immortal God" sent into the world to make religion practical by protecting the poor and resisting wrong. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." In the service of God and the Nation, the Guru lost his life, and in losing it has found it in Him,—the *Akala Purukha*, the Eternal that ages not!

Printed by : D. D. Gangal, Lokasangraha
Press, 624 Sadashiv Peth, Poona 2,
and Published by : J. P. Vaswani
for Gita Publishing House, 10 Connaught
Road, Poona-1, (India).

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